

## THE ECONOMY OF INDO-CHINA

the changing native mentality, a decline in European prestige—all were reflected in the new labour problems. This change in attitude was less apparent among the agricultural than among the industrial workers. From 1920 to 1925 occurred the first serious conflicts: out of these, in turn, came government intervention and the beginning of real labour legislation.

In 1913 Sarraut had created an Inspection of Cochinese labour. By 1918 this was extended to the other countries, excepting Laos, and embodied in a code that is still the basis of the colony's labour legislation. The government's control was initiated from the moment the contract was signed and deposited in the presence of an official. The contract's duration was not to exceed three years of labour, and work was limited to a ten-hour day, with extra pay for supplementary work. The coolie had a right to lodging, care, and medical attention, and the non-separation of families. Fines and imprisonment were specified for failure to live up to these conditions. Desertion on the part of the labourer was defined as forty-eight hours<sup>3</sup> absence from the plantation, but there were also stricter penalties for defaulting employers.

This code proved fundamentally satisfactory, but it had inevitable gaps which the development of plantations made increasingly evident. There was a phenomenal growth in the number of coolies imported: 3,684 in 1925; 17,177 in 1926; 18,000 in 1927; with a drop to 7428 in 1929. The administration tried both to simplify and improve the formalities of recruiting, but in view of the steady decline of contracts, the planters have more and more claimed the right to hire workers without preliminary authorization. The chief cause of friction between

planters and administration is the restriction of the  
 recruiting zones.  
 North Annam and the Tonkinese delta are the regions  
 most open, and  
 eight thousand coolies might be transported annually  
 from there to the  
 South. Unfortunately the population is most scattered  
 in the moun-  
 tainous mining areas. The fear lest wholesale  
 emigration raise to pro-  
 hibitive prices the cost of Tonkinese labour is the  
 basis of attacks  
 on the government's policy, by colonists like De  
 Monpezat.<sup>1</sup> The  
 government points out with justice that the decline in  
 contracts is due  
 principally to the world depression, and that a rise in  
 the cost of  
 Northern labour has made for higher standards of  
 native living in the  
 miserable over-populated North.

The unscrupulousness of native labour agents is  
 beyond dispute.  
 Sorcery, the use of drugs, and a gross misrepresentation  
 of the contract,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. below, p, 163.